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The Doctor and the Saint

Ambedkar, Gandhi and the battle against caste

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BR Ambedkar in Bombay, in 1939—three years after publishing Annihilation of Caste, his most radical text.

[I]

ANNIHILATION OF CASTE is the nearly eighty-year-old text of a speech that was never delivered.* When I first read it I felt as though somebody had walked into a dim room and opened the windows. Reading Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar bridges the gap between what most Indians are schooled to believe in and the reality we experience every day of our lives.

My father was a Hindu, a Brahmo. I never met him until I was an adult. I grew up with my mother, in a Syrian Christian family in Ayemenem, a small village in communist-ruled Kerala. And yet all around me were the fissures and cracks of caste. Ayemenem had its own separate “Parayan” church where “Parayan” priests preached to an “untouchable” congregation. Caste was implied in peoples’ names, in the way people referred to each other, in the work they did, in the clothes they wore, in the marriages that were arranged, in the language we spoke. Even so, I never encountered the notion of caste in a single school textbook. Reading Ambedkar alerted me to a gaping hole in our pedagogical universe. Reading him also made it clear why that hole exists and why it will continue to exist until Indian society undergoes radical, revolutionary change.

Revolutions can, and often have, begun with reading.

Ambedkar was a prolific writer. Unfortunately his work, unlike the writings of Gandhi, Nehru or Vivekananda, does not shine out at you from the shelves of libraries and bookshops.

Of his many volumes, *Annihilation of Caste* is his most radical text. It is not an argument directed at Hindu fundamentalists or

extremists, but at those who consider themselves moderate, those whom Ambedkar called "the best of Hindus"—and some academics call "left-wing Hindus."[1] Ambedkar's point is that to believe in the Hindu shastras and to simultaneously think of oneself as liberal or moderate is a contradiction in terms.

When the text of *Annihilation of Caste* was published, the man who is often called the "greatest of Hindus"—Mahatma Gandhi—responded to Ambedkar's provocation. Their debate was not a new one. Both men were their generation's emissaries of a profound social, political and philosophical conflict that had begun long ago and has still by no means ended.

Ambedkar, the untouchable, was heir to an anticaste intellectual tradition that goes back to 200–100 BCE. The practice of caste, which is believed to have its genesis in the Purusha Sukta hymn[2] in the Rig Veda (1200–900 BCE), faced its first challenge only a thousand years later, when the Buddhists broke with caste by creating sanghas that admitted everybody, regardless of which caste they belonged to. Yet caste endured and evolved. In the mid-twelfth century, the Veerashaivas led by Basava challenged caste in South India, and were crushed. From the fourteenth century onwards, the beloved Bhakti poet-saints—Cokhamela, Ravidas, Kabir, Tukaram, Mira, Janabai—became, and remain, the poets of the anticaste tradition. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came Jotirao Phule and his Satyashodhak Samaj in western India; Pandita Ramabai, perhaps India's first feminist, a Marathi Brahmin who rejected Hinduism and converted to Christianity (and challenged that, too); Swami Achutanand Harihar, who led the Adi Hindu movement, started the Bharatiya Achhut Mahasabha (Parliament of Indian Untouchables), and edited *Achhut*, the first Dalit journal; Ayyankali and Sree Narayana Guru, who shook up the old order in Malabar and Travancore; and the iconoclast Iyothee Thass and his Sakya Buddhists, who ridiculed Brahmin supremacy in the Tamil world. Among Ambedkar's contemporaries in the anticaste tradition were E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, known as "Periyar" in the Madras Presidency; Jogendranath Mandal of Bengal; and Babu Mangoo Ram, who founded the Ad Dharm movement in the Punjab that rejected both Sikhism and Hinduism. These were Ambedkar's people.

Gandhi, a Vaishya, born into a Gujarati Bania family, was the latest in a long tradition of privileged-caste Hindu reformers and their organisations: Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who founded the Brahmo Samaj in 1828; Swami Dayananda Saraswati, who founded the Arya Samaj in 1875; Swami Vivekananda, who established the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897; and a host of other, more contemporary reformist organisations.[3]

Putting the Ambedkar–Gandhi debate into context for those unfamiliar with its history and its protagonists will require detours into their very different political trajectories. For this was by no means just a theoretical debate between two men who held different opinions. Each represented very separate interest groups, and their battle unfolded in the heart of India's national movement. What they said and did continues to have an immense bearing on contemporary politics. Their differences were (and remain) irreconcilable. Both are deeply loved and often deified by their followers. It pleases neither constituency to have the other's story told, though the two are inextricably linked. Ambedkar was Gandhi's most formidable adversary. He challenged him not just politically or intellectually, but also morally. To have excised Ambedkar from Gandhi's story, which is the story we all grew up on, is a travesty. Equally, to ignore Gandhi while writing about Ambedkar is to do Ambedkar a disservice, because Gandhi loomed over Ambedkar's world in myriad and un-wonderful ways.

THE INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT, as we know, had a stellar cast. It has even been the subject of a Hollywood blockbuster that won eight Oscars. In India, we have made a pastime of holding opinion polls and publishing books and magazines in which our constellation of founding fathers (mothers don't make the cut) are arranged and rearranged in various hierarchies and formations. Gandhi does have his bitter critics, but he still tops the charts. For others to even get a look-in, the Father of the Nation has to be segregated, put into a separate category: Who, after Mahatma Gandhi, is the greatest Indian?[4]

Ambedkar (who, incidentally, did not even have a walk-on part in Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*, though the film was co-funded by the Indian government) almost always makes it into the final heat. He is chosen more for the part he played in drafting the Indian constitution than for the politics and the passion that were at the core of his life and thinking. You definitely get the sense that his presence on the lists is the result of positive discrimination, a desire to be politically correct. The caveats continue to be murmured: "opportunist" (because he served as Labour Member of the British Viceroy's Executive Council, between 1942 and 1946), "British stooge" (because he accepted an invitation from the British government to the First Round Table Conference, in 1930, when Congressmen were being imprisoned for breaking the salt laws), "separatist" (because he wanted separate electorates for untouchables), and "anti-national" (because he endorsed the Muslim League's case for Pakistan, and because he suggested that Jammu and Kashmir be trifurcated).[5]

Notwithstanding the name-calling, the fact is that neither Ambedkar nor Gandhi allows us to pin easy labels on them that say

"pro-imperialist" or "anti-imperialist." Their conflict complicates and perhaps enriches our understanding of imperialism as well as the struggle against it.

History has been kind to Gandhi. He was deified by millions of people in his own lifetime. His godliness has become a universal and, it seems, eternal phenomenon. It's not just that the metaphor has outstripped the man. It has entirely reinvented him (which is why a critique of Gandhi need not automatically be taken to be a critique of all Gandhians). Gandhi has become all things to all people: Obama loves him and so does the Occupy movement. Anarchists love him and so does the establishment. Narendra Modi loves him and so does Rahul Gandhi. The poor love him and so do the rich.

He is the Saint of the Status Quo.

Gandhi's life and his writing—48,000 pages bound into 98 volumes of collected works—have been disaggregated and carried off, event by event, sentence by sentence, until no coherent narrative remains, if indeed there ever was one. The trouble is that Gandhi actually said everything and its opposite. To cherry pickers, he offers such a bewildering variety of cherries that you have to wonder if there was something the matter with the tree.

For example, there's his well-known description of an Arcadian paradise in "The Pyramid vs. the Oceanic Circle," written in 1946:

> Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic or panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world… In this structure composed of innumerable villages there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village… Therefore the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it.[6]

Then there is his endorsement of the caste system in 1921 in *Navajivan*. It is translated from Gujarati by Ambedkar (who suggested more than once that Gandhi "deceived" people, and that his writings in English and Gujarati could be productively compared):[7]

> Caste is another name for control. Caste puts a limit on enjoyment. Caste does not allow a person to transgress caste limits in pursuit of his enjoyment. That is the meaning of such caste restrictions as inter-dining and inter-marriage… These being my views I am opposed to all those who are out to destroy the Caste System.[8]

Is this not the very antithesis of "ever-widening and never ascending circles"?

It's true that these statements were made 25 years apart. Does that mean that Gandhi reformed, that he changed his views on caste? He did, at a glacial pace. From believing in the caste system in all its minutiae, he moved to saying that the four thousand separate castes should "fuse" themselves into the four varnas (what Ambedkar called the "parent" of the caste system). Towards the end of Gandhi's life (when his views were just views and did not run the risk of translating into political action), he said that he no longer objected to inter-dining and intermarriage between castes. Sometimes he said that though he believed in the varna system, a person's varna ought to be decided by their worth and not their birth (which was also the Arya Samaj position). Ambedkar pointed out the absurdity of this idea: "How are you going to compel people who have achieved a higher status based on their birth, without reference to their worth, to vacate that status? How are you going to compel people to recognise the status due to a man in accordance to his worth who is occupying a lower status based on his birth?"[9] He went on to ask what would happen to women—whether their status would be decided upon their own worth or their husbands' worth.

Notwithstanding stories and anecdotes from Gandhi's followers about Gandhi's love for untouchables and the inter-caste weddings he attended, in the 98 volumes of his writing, Gandhi never decisively and categorically renounced his belief in chaturvarna, the system of four varnas. Though he was given to apologising and agonising publicly and privately over things like occasional lapses in his control over his sexual desire,[10] he never agonised over the extremely damaging things he had said and done on caste.

Still, why not eschew the negative and concentrate instead on what was good about Gandhi, use it to bring out the best in people? It is a valid question, and one that those who have built shrines to Gandhi have probably answered for themselves. After all, it is possible to admire the work of great composers, writers, architects, sportspersons and musicians whose views are

inimical to our own. The difference is that Gandhi was not a composer or writer or musician or sportsman. He offered himself to us as a visionary, a mystic, a moralist, a great humanitarian, the man who brought down a mighty empire armed only with Truth and Righteousness. How do we reconcile the idea of the non-violent Gandhi, the Gandhi who spoke truth to power, Gandhi the nemesis of injustice, the gentle Gandhi, the androgynous Gandhi, Gandhi the mother, the Gandhi who (allegedly) feminised politics and created space for women to enter the political arena, the eco-Gandhi, the Gandhi of the ready wit and some great one-liners—how do we reconcile all this with Gandhi's views (and deeds) on caste? What do we do with this structure of moral righteousness that rests so comfortably on a foundation of utterly brutal, institutionalised injustice? Is it enough to say Gandhi was complicated, and let it go at that? There is no doubt that Gandhi was an extraordinary and fascinating man, but during India's struggle for freedom, did he really speak truth to power? Did he really ally himself with the poorest of the poor, the most vulnerable of his people?

"It is foolish to take solace in the fact that because the Congress is fighting for the freedom of India, it is, therefore, fighting for the freedom of the people of India and of the lowest of the low," Ambedkar said. "The question whether the Congress is fighting for freedom has very little importance as compared to the question for whose freedom is the Congress fighting."[11]

In 1931, when Ambedkar met Gandhi for the first time, Gandhi questioned him about his sharp criticism of the Congress (which, it was assumed, was tantamount to criticising the struggle for the homeland). "Gandhiji, I have no Homeland," was Ambedkar's famous reply. "No Untouchable worth the name will be proud of this land."[12]

History has been unkind to Ambedkar. First it contained him, and then it glorified him. It has made him India's Leader of the Untouchables, the king of the ghetto. It has hidden away his writings. It has stripped away the radical intellect and the searing insolence.

All the same, Ambedkar's followers have kept his legacy alive in creative ways. One of those ways is to turn him into a million mass-produced statues. The Ambedkar statue is a radical and animate object.[13] It has been sent forth into the world to claim the space—both physical and virtual, public and private—that is the Dalit's due. Dalits have used Ambedkar's statue to assert their civil rights—to claim land that is owed them, water that is theirs, commons they are denied access to. The Ambedkar statue that is planted on the commons and rallied around always holds a book in its hand. Significantly, that book is not *Annihilation of Caste* with its liberating, revolutionary rage. It is a copy of the Indian Constitution that Ambedkar played a vital role in conceptualising—the document that now, for better or for worse, governs the life of every single Indian citizen.

Using the Constitution as a subversive object is one thing. Being limited by it is quite another. Ambedkar's circumstances forced him to be a revolutionary and to simultaneously put his foot in the door of the establishment whenever he got a chance to. His genius lay in his ability to use both these aspects of himself nimbly, and to great effect. Viewed through the prism of the present, however, it has meant that he left behind a dual and sometimes confusing legacy: Ambedkar the radical, and Ambedkar the father of the Indian Constitution. Constitutionalism can come in the way of revolution. And the Dalit revolution has not happened yet. We still await it. Before that there cannot be any other, not in India.

This is not to suggest that writing a constitution cannot be a radical act. It can be, it could have been, and Ambedkar tried his best to make it one. However, by his own admission, he did not entirely succeed.

As India hurtled towards independence, both Ambedkar and Gandhi were seriously concerned about the fate of minorities, particularly Muslims and untouchables, but they responded to the approaching birth of the new nation in very different ways. Gandhi distanced himself more and more from the business of nation building. For him, the Congress party's work was done. He wanted the party dissolved. He believed (quite rightly) that the state represented violence in a concentrated and organised form, that because it was not a human entity, because it was soulless, it owed its very existence to violence.[14] In Gandhi's understanding, *swaraj*, or self-rule, lived in the moral heart of his people, though he made it clear that by "his people" he did not mean the majority community alone:

> It has been said that Indian swaraj will be the rule of the majority community, i.e., the Hindus. There could not be a greater mistake than that. If it were to be true, I for one would refuse to call it swaraj and would fight it with all the strength at my command, for to me *Hind Swaraj* is the rule of all the people, is the rule of justice.[15]

For Ambedkar, "the people" was not a homogeneous category that glowed with the rosy hue of innate righteousness. He knew that, regardless of what Gandhi said, it would inevitably be the majority community that decided what form swaraj would take.

The prospect of India's untouchables being ruled by nothing other than the moral heart of India's predominantly Hindu people filled him with foreboding. Ambedkar became anxious, even desperate, to manoeuvre himself into becoming a member of the Constituent Assembly, a position that would enable him to influence the shape and the spirit of the constitution for the emerging nation in real and practical ways. For this he was even prepared to set aside his pride, and his misgivings about his old foe, the Congress party.

Ambedkar's main concern was to privilege and legalise "constitutional morality" over the traditional, social morality of the caste system. Speaking in the Constituent Assembly on 4 November 1948, he said, "Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated. We must realise that our people have yet to learn it. Democracy in India is only a top-dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic."[16]

Ambedkar was seriously disappointed with the final draft of the constitution. Still, he did succeed in putting in place certain rights and safeguards that would, as far as the subordinated castes were concerned, make it a document that was more enlightened than the society it was drafted for. (For others, however, like India's adivasis, the constitution turned out to be just an extension of colonial practice.) Ambedkar thought of the constitution as a work in progress. Like Thomas Jefferson, he believed that unless every generation had the right to create a new constitution for itself, the earth would belong to "the dead and not the living."[17] (The trouble is that the living are not necessarily more progressive or enlightened than the dead. There are a number of forces today, political as well as commercial, that are lobbying to rewrite the constitution in utterly regressive ways.)

Though Ambedkar was a lawyer, he had no illusions about law-making. As law minister in post-independence India, he worked for months on a draft of the Hindu Code Bill. He believed that the caste system advanced itself by controlling women, and one of his major concerns was to make Hindu personal law more equitable for women.[18] The bill he proposed sanctioned divorce and expanded the property rights of widows and daughters. The Constituent Assembly dragged its feet over it for four years (from 1947 to 1951) and then blocked it.[19] The president, Rajendra Prasad, threatened to stall the bill's passage into law. Hindu sadhus laid siege to Parliament. Industrialists and zamindars warned they would withdraw their support in the coming elections.[20] Eventually Ambedkar resigned as law minister. In his resignation speech he said: "To leave inequality between class and class, between sex and sex, which is the soul of Hindu society, and to go on passing legislation relating to economic problems is to make a farce of our Constitution and to build a palace on a dung heap."[21]

More than anything else, what Ambedkar brought to a complicated, multifaceted political struggle, with more than its fair share of sectarianism, obscurantism and skulduggery, was intelligence.

[II]

ANNIHILATION OF CASTE is the text of a speech Ambedkar was supposed to deliver in Lahore, in 1936, to an audience of privileged-caste Hindus. The organisation that had been bold enough to invite him to deliver its presidential address was the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal (the Forum for the Break-up of Caste) of Lahore, an offshoot of the Arya Samaj. Most of its members were privileged-caste Hindu reformers. They asked to be provided the text of the speech in advance, so that they could print and distribute it. When they read it and realised that Ambedkar was going to launch an intellectual assault on the Vedas and shastras, on Hinduism itself, they wrote to him:

> Those of us who would like to see the conference terminate without any untoward incident would prefer that at least the word 'Veda' be left out for the time being. I leave this to your good sense. I hope, however, in your concluding paragraphs you will make it clear that the views expressed in the address are your own and that the responsibility does not lie on the Mandal.[22]

Ambedkar refused to alter his speech, and so the event was cancelled. His text ought not to have come as such a surprise to the Mandal. Just a few months previously, on 13 October 1935, at the Depressed Classes Conference in Yeola in the Bombay Presidency (now in the state of Maharashtra), Ambedkar had told an audience of more than ten thousand people:

> Because we have the misfortune of calling ourselves Hindus, we are treated thus. If we were members of another faith none would treat us so. Choose any religion which gives you equality of status and treatment. We shall repair our

> mistake now. I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of an Untouchable. However, it is not my fault; but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power.[23]

At that particular moment in time, the threat of religious conversion by an untouchable leader of Ambedkar's standing came as the worst possible news to Hindu reformers.

Conversion was by no means new. Seeking to escape the stigma of caste, untouchable and other degraded labouring castes had begun to convert to other religions centuries ago. Millions had converted to Islam during the years of Muslim rule. Later, millions more had taken to Sikhism and Christianity. (Sadly, caste prejudice in the subcontinent trumps religious belief. Though their scriptures do not sanction it, elite Indian Muslims, Sikhs and Christians all practise caste discrimination.[24] Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal all have their own communities of untouchable sweepers. So does Kashmir.)

The mass conversion of oppressed-caste Hindus, particularly to Islam, continues to sit uncomfortably with Hindu supremacist history writing, which dwells on a golden age of Hinduism that was brought to naught by the cruelty and vandalism of Muslim rule.[25] Vandalism and cruelty there certainly was. Yet it meant different things to different people. Here is Jotirao Phule (1827–1890), the earliest of the modern anticaste intellectuals, on the subject of Muslim rule and of the so-called golden age of the Arya Bhats (Brahmins):

> The Muslims, destroying the carved stone images of the cunning Arya Bhats, forcibly enslaved them and brought the Shudras and Ati-Shudras in great numbers out of their clutches and made them Muslims, including them in the Muslim Religion. Not only this, but they established inter-dining and intermarriage with them and gave them all equal rights. They made them all as happy as themselves and forced the Arya Bhats to see all this.[26]

By the turn of the century, however, religious conversion came to have completely different implications in India. A new set of unfamiliar considerations entered the mix. Opposing an unpopular regime was no longer just a question of a conquering army riding into the capital, overthrowing the monarch and taking the throne. The old idea of empire was metamorphosing into the new idea of the nation state. Modern governance now involved addressing the volatile question of the right to representation: who had the right to represent the Indian people? The Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Christians, the privileged castes, the oppressed castes, the farmers, the workers? How would the "self" in self-rule—the "swa" in swaraj—be constituted? Who would decide? Suddenly, a people who belonged to an impossibly diverse range of races, castes, tribes and religions—who, between them, spoke more than one thousand languages—had to be transformed into modern citizens of a modern nation. The process of synthetic homogenisation began to have the opposite effect. Even as the modern Indian nation constituted itself, it began to fracture.

Under the new dispensation, demography became vitally important. The empirical taxonomy of the British census had solidified and freeze-dried the rigid but not entirely inflexible hierarchy of caste, adding its own prejudices and value judgements to the mix, classifying entire communities as "criminals" and "warriors" and so on. The untouchable castes were entered under the accounting head "Hindu." (In 1930, according to Ambedkar, the untouchables numbered about 44.5 million.[27] The population of African Americans in the United States around the same time was 8.8 million.) The large-scale exodus of untouchables from the Hindu fold would have been catastrophic for the "Hindu" majority. In pre-partition, undivided Punjab, for example, between 1881 and 1941, the Hindu population dropped from 43.8 percent to 29.1 percent, due largely to the conversion of the subordinated castes to Islam, Sikhism and Christianity.[28]

Hindu reformers hurried to stem this migration. The Arya Samaj, founded in 1875 by Dayananda Saraswati (born Mool Shankar, a Gujarati Brahmin from Kathiawar), was one of the earliest. It preached against the practice of untouchability and banned idol worship. Dayananda Saraswati initiated the Shuddhi programme in 1877, to "purify the impure," and, in the early nineteenth century, his disciples took this up on a mass scale in North India.

In 1899, Swami Vivekananda of the Ramakrishna Math—the man who became famous in 1893 when he addressed the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in his sadhu's robes—said, "Every man going out of the Hindu pale is not only a man less, but an enemy the more."[29] A raft of new reformist outfits appeared in Punjab, committed to saving Hinduism by winning the hearts and minds of untouchables: the Shradhananda Dalituddhar Sabha, the All-India Achhutodhar Committee, the Punjab Achhut Udhar Mandal and the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal which was part of the Arya Samaj.[30]

The reformers' use of the words "Hindu" and "Hinduism" was new. Until then, they had been used by the British as well as the

Mughals, but it was not the way people who were described as Hindus chose to describe themselves. Until the panic over demography began, they had always foregrounded their jati, their caste identity. “The first and foremost thing that must be recognised is that Hindu society is a myth. The name Hindu itself is a foreign name,” said Ambedkar.

> It was given by the Mohammedans to the natives [who lived east of the river Indus] for the purpose of distinguishing themselves. It does not occur in any Sanskrit work prior to the Mohammedan invasion. They did not feel the necessity of a common name, because they had no sense of their having constituted a community. Hindu society does not exist. It is just a collection of castes.[31]

When reformers began to use the word “Hindu” to describe themselves and their organisations, it had less to do with religion than with trying to forge a unified political constitution out of a divided people. This explains the reformers’ constant references to the “Hindu nation” or the “Hindu race.”[32] This political Hinduism later came to be called Hindutva.[33]

The issue of demography was addressed openly, and head-on. “In this country, the government is based on numbers,” wrote the editor of *Pratap*, a Kanpur newspaper, on 10 January 1921.

> Shuddhi has become a matter of life and death for Hindus. The Muslims have grown from negative quantity into 70 million. The Christians number four million. 220 million Hindus are finding it hard to live because of 70 million Muslims. If their numbers increase only God knows what will happen. It is true that Shuddhi should be for religious purposes alone, but the Hindus have been obliged by other considerations as well to embrace their other brothers. If the Hindus do not wake up now, they will be finished.[34]

Conservative Hindu organisations like the Hindu Mahasabha took the task beyond rhetoric, and against their own deeply held beliefs and practice began to proselytise energetically against untouchability. Untouchables had to be prevented from defecting. They had to be assimilated, their proteins broken down. They had to be brought into the big house, but kept in the servants’ quarters. Here is Ambedkar on the subject:

> It is true that Hinduism can absorb many things. The beef-eating Hinduism (or strictly speaking Brahminism which is the proper name of Hinduism in its earlier stage) absorbed the non-violence theory of Buddhism and became a religion of vegetarianism. But there is one thing which Hinduism has never been able to do—namely to adjust itself to absorb the Untouchables or to remove the bar of untouchability.[35]

While the Hindu reformers went about their business, anticaste movements led by untouchables began to organise themselves too. Swami Acchhutanand Harihar presented the Prince of Wales with a charter of 17 demands including land reform, separate schools for untouchable children and separate electorates. Another well-known figure was Babu Mangoo Ram. He was a member of the revolutionary, anti-imperialist Ghadar Party established in 1913, predominantly by Punjabi migrants in the United States and Canada. Ghadar (“Revolt”) was an international movement of Punjabi Indians who had been inspired by the 1857 Mutiny, also called the First War of Independence. Its aim was to overthrow the British by means of armed struggle. (It was, in some ways, India’s first communist party. Unlike the Congress, which had an urban, privileged-caste leadership, the Ghadar Party was closely linked to the Punjab peasantry. Though it has ceased to exist, its memory continues to be a rallying point for several left-wing revolutionary parties in Punjab.) However, when Babu Mangoo Ram returned to India after a decade in the United States, the caste system was waiting for him. He found he was untouchable again.[36] In 1926, he founded the Ad Dharm movement, with Ravidas, the Bhakti sant, as its spiritual hero. Ad Dharmis declared that they were neither Sikh nor Hindu. Many Untouchables left the Arya Samaj to join the Ad Dharm movement.[37] Babu Mangoo Ram went on to become a comrade of Ambedkar’s.

The anxiety over demography made for turbulent politics. There were other lethal games afoot. The British government had given itself the right to rule India by imperial fiat and had consolidated its power by working closely with the Indian elite, taking care never to upset the status quo.[38] It had drained the wealth of a once-wealthy subcontinent—or, shall we say, drained the wealth of the elite in a once-wealthy subcontinent. It had caused famines in which millions had died while the British government exported food to England.[39] None of that stopped it from also lighting sly fires that ignited caste and communal tension. In 1905, it partitioned Bengal along communal lines. In 1909, it passed the Morley-Minto reforms, granting Muslims a separate electorate in the central and provincial legislative councils. It began to question the moral and political legitimacy of anybody who opposed it. How could a people who practised something as primitive as untouchability talk of self-rule? How could the

Congress party, run by elite, privileged-caste Hindus, claim to represent the Muslims? Or the untouchables? Coming from the British government, it was surely wicked, but even wicked questions need answers.

The person who stepped into the widening breach was perhaps the most consummate politician the modern world has ever known—Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. If the British had their imperial mandate to raise them above the fray, Gandhi had his mahatmahood.

[III]

FOR MORE THAN THIRTY-FIVE YEARS BEFORE THAT, Gandhi's mahatmahood had billowed like a sail in the winds of the national movement. He captured the world's imagination. He roused hundreds of thousands of people into direct political action. He was the cynosure of all eyes, the voice of the nation. In 1931, at the Second Round Table Conference in London, Gandhi claimed—with complete equanimity—that he represented all of India. At the conference, in his first public confrontation with Ambedkar (over Ambedkar's proposal for a separate electorate for untouchables), Gandhi felt able to say, "I claim myself in my own person to represent the vast mass of Untouchables."[40]

How could a privileged-caste Bania claim that he, in his own person, represented 45 million Indian untouchables unless he believed he actually was a mahatma? Mahatmahood provided Gandhi with an amplitude that was not available to ordinary mortals. It allowed him to use his "inner voice" affectively, effectively, and often. It allowed him the bandwidth to make daily broadcasts on the state of his hygiene, his diet, his bowel movements, his enemas and his sex life, and to draw the public into a net of prurient intimacy that he could then use and manipulate when he embarked on his fasts and other public acts of self-punishment. It permitted him to contradict himself constantly and then say: "My aim is not to be consistent with my previous statements on a given question, but to be consistent with the truth as it may present itself to me in a given moment. The result has been that I have grown from truth to truth."[41]

Ordinary politicians oscillate from political expediency to political expediency. A mahatma can grow from truth to truth.

How did Gandhi come to be called a mahatma? Did he begin with the compassion and egalitarian instincts of a saint? Did they come to him along the way?

In his recent biography of Gandhi, the historian Ramachandra Guha argues that it was the two decades he spent working in South Africa that made Gandhi a mahatma.[42] His canonisation—the first time he was publicly called Mahatma—was in 1915, soon after he returned from South Africa to begin work in India, at a meeting in Gondal, close to his hometown, Porbandar, in Gujarat.[43] At the time, few in India knew more than some very sketchy, rather inaccurate accounts of the struggles he had been engaged in. These need to be examined in some detail because whether or not they made him a mahatma, they certainly shaped and defined his views on caste, race and imperialism. His views on race presaged his views on caste. What happened in South Africa continues to have serious implications for the Indian community there. Fortunately, we have the Mahatma's own words (and inconsistencies) to give us the detail and texture of those years.[44] To generations who have been raised on a diet of Gandhi hagiographies (including myself), to learn of what happened in South Africa is not just disturbing, it is almost stupefying.

GANDHI, 24 YEARS OLD AND TRAINED as a lawyer at London's Inner Temple, arrived in South Africa in May 1893. He had a job as legal adviser to a wealthy Gujarati Muslim merchant. Imperial Britain was tightening its grip on the African continent. Gandhi was unkindly jolted into political awakening a few months after he arrived. Half the story is legendary: Gandhi was thrown out of a "Whites only" first-class coach of a train in Pietermaritzburg. The other half of the story is less known: Gandhi was not offended by racial segregation. He was offended that "passenger Indians"—Indian merchants who were predominantly Muslim but also privileged-caste Hindus—who had come to South Africa to do business, were being treated on a par with native black Africans. Gandhi's argument was that passenger Indians came to Natal as British subjects and were entitled to equal treatment on the basis of Queen Victoria's 1858 proclamation, which asserted the equality of all imperial subjects.

In 1894, he became secretary of the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), which was founded and funded by rich Indian merchants and traders. The membership fee, of three pounds, was a princely sum that meant the NIC would remain an elite club.[45] (For a sense of proportion: 12 years later, the Zulus would rise in rebellion against the British for imposing an unaffordable one-pound

poll tax on them.)

One of the earliest political victories for the NIC came in 1895 with a "solution" to what was known as the Durban Post Office problem. The post office had only two entrances: one for blacks and one for whites. Gandhi petitioned the authorities and had a third entrance opened so that Indians did not need to use the same entrance as the "Kaffirs."[46] In an open letter to the Natal Legislative Assembly dated 19 December 1894, he says that both the English and the Indians "spring from common stock, called the Indo-Aryan," and cites Max Müller, Arthur Schopenhauer and William Jones to buttress his argument. He complains that the "Indian is being dragged down to the position of a raw Kaffir."[47]

As spokesman for the Indian community, Gandhi was always careful to distinguish—and distance—passenger Indians from indentured workers:

> Whether they are Hindus or Mahommedans, they are absolutely without any moral or religious instruction worthy of the name. They have not learned enough to educate themselves without any outside help. Placed thus, they are apt to yield to the slightest temptation to tell a lie. After some time, lying with them becomes a habit and a disease. They would lie without any reason, without any prospect of bettering themselves materially, indeed, without knowing what they are doing. They reach a stage in life when their moral faculties have completely collapsed owing to neglect.[48]

The Indian indentured labourers whose "moral faculties" were in such a state of collapse were largely from the subordinated castes and lived and worked in conditions of virtual slavery, incarcerated on sugar cane farms. They were flogged, starved, imprisoned, often sexually abused, and died in great numbers.[49]

Gandhi soon became the most prominent spokesperson for the cause of the passenger Indians. In 1896, he travelled to India where he addressed packed—and increasingly indignant—meetings about the racism that Indians were being subjected to in South Africa. At the time, the White regime was getting increasingly anxious about the rapidly expanding Indian population. For them Gandhi was the leader of the "coolies"—their name for all Indians.[50] In a perverse sense, their racism was inclusive; it didn't notice the distinctions that Gandhi went to such great lengths to make.

When Gandhi returned to Durban, the news of his campaign had preceded him. His ship was met by thousands of hostile white demonstrators, who refused to let it dock. It took several days of negotiations before Gandhi was allowed to disembark. On his way home, on 12 January 1897, he was attacked and beaten. He bore the attack with fortitude and dignity.[51] Two days later, in an interview to *The Natal Advertiser*, Gandhi once again distanced himself from the "coolies":

> I have said most emphatically, in the pamphlets and elsewhere, that the treatment of the indentured Indians is no worse or better in Natal than they receive in any other parts of the world. I have never endeavoured to show that the indentured Indians have been receiving cruel treatment.[52]

IN 1899, the British went to war with Dutch settlers over the spoils of South Africa. Diamonds had been discovered in Kimberley in 1870, and gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886. The Anglo-Boer War, as it was called then, is known more properly today as the South African War or the White Man's War. Thousands of black Africans and indentured Indian labourers were dragooned into the armies on either side. The Indians were not given arms, so they worked as menials and stretcher-bearers. Gandhi and a band of passenger Indians, who felt it was their responsibility as imperial subjects, volunteered their services to the British. Gandhi was enlisted in the Ambulance Corps.

It was a brutal war in which British troops fought Boer guerrillas. The British burnt down thousands of Boer farms, slaughtering people and cattle as they swept through the land. Tens of thousands of Boer civilians, mostly women and children, were moved into concentration camps, in which almost thirty thousand people died. Many simply starved to death.[53] These concentration camps were the first of their kind, the progenitors of Hitler's extermination camps for Jews. Several years later, after he returned to India, when Gandhi wrote about the South African war in his memoirs, he suggested that the prisoners in the camps were practicing a cheerful form of satyagraha (which was the course of action he prescribed to the Jews of Germany too):[54]

> Boer women understood that their religion required them to suffer in order to preserve their independence, and therefore, patiently and cheerfully endured all hardships… They starved, they suffered biting cold and scorching heat. Sometimes a soldier intoxicated by liquor or maddened by passion might even assault these unprotected women. Still the

> brave women did not flinch.[55]

After the war, the British announced that their troops would be given a slab each of "Queen's Chocolate" as a reward for their bravery. Gandhi wrote a letter to the Colonial Secretary to ask for the largesse to be extended to the Ambulance Corps leaders, who had volunteered without pay: "It will be greatly appreciated by them and prized as a treasure if the terms under which the gift has been graciously made by Her Majesty would allow of its distribution among the Indian leaders."[56] The Colonial Secretary replied curtly to say that the chocolate was only for non-commissioned officers.

In 1901, with the Boer War now behind him, Gandhi spoke of how the objectives of the Natal Indian Congress were to achieve a better understanding between the English and the Indians. He said he was looking forward to an "Imperial Brotherhood," towards which "everyone who was the friend of the Empire should aim."[57]

This was not to be. The Boers managed to out-manoeuvre and out-brotherhood Gandhi. In 1902, they signed the Treaty of Vereeniging with the British. According to the treaty, the Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State became colonies of the British Empire under the sovereignty of the British Crown. In return, the British government agreed to give the colonies self-rule. The Boers became the British government's brutal lieutenants. Jan Smuts, once a dreaded Boer "terrorist," switched sides and eventually led the British Army of South Africa in the First World War. The white folks made peace. They divided the diamonds, the gold and the land between themselves. Blacks, Indians and "coloureds" were left out of the equation.

Gandhi was not deterred. A few years after the South African War, he once again volunteered for active service.

In 1906, the Zulu chief Bambatha kaMancinza led his people in an uprising against the British government's newly imposed one-pound poll tax. The Zulus and the British were old enemies and had fought each other before. In 1879, the Zulus had routed the British Army when it attacked the Zulu kingdom, a victory that put the Zulu on the world map. Over the years, because they could not match the firepower of British troops, they were conquered and driven off their land. Still, they refused to work on the white man's farms; which is why indentured labour was shipped in from India. Time and again, the Zulus had risen up. During the Bambatha Rebellion, the rebels, armed only with spears and cowhide shields, fought British troops equipped with modern artillery.

As the news of the rebellion came in, Gandhi published a series of letters in *Indian Opinion*, a newspaper, published in four languages, he had started in 1903. (One of its chief benefactors was Sir Ratanji Jamsetji Tata of the Tata industrial empire.) In a letter dated 18 November 1905, Gandhi said:

> At the time of the Boer War, it will be remembered, the Indians volunteered to do any work that might be entrusted to them, and it was with great difficulty that they could get their services accepted even for ambulance work. General Butler has certified as to what kind of work the Natal Indian Volunteer Ambulance Corps did. If the Government only realised what reserve force is being wasted, they would make use of it and would give Indians a thorough training for actual warfare.[58]

On 14 April 1906, Gandhi wrote again in *Indian Opinion* (translated from Gujarati):

> What is our duty during these calamitous times in the Colony? It is not for us to say whether the revolt of the Kaffirs [Zulus] is justified or not. We are in Natal by virtue of British Power. Our very existence depends on it. It is therefore our duty to render whatever help we can. There was a discussion in the Press as to what part the Indian community would play in the event of an actual war. We have already declared in the English columns of this journal that the Indian community is prepared to play its part; and we believe what we did during the Boer War should also be done now.[59]

The rebellion was eventually contained. Chief Bambatha was captured and beheaded. Four thousand Zulus were killed, thousands more flogged and imprisoned. Even Winston Churchill, master of war, at the time under secretary of state, was disturbed by the violence. He said: "It is my duty to warn the Secretary of State that this further disgusting butchery will excite in all probability great disapproval in the House of Commons… The score between black and white stands at present at about 3500 to 8."[60]

Gandhi, on his part, never regretted the role he played in the White Man's War and in the Bambatha uprising. He just reimagined it. Years later, in 1928, in *Satyagraha in South Africa*,[61] the memoirs he wrote in Yerawada Central Jail, both stories

had, shall we say, evolved. By then the chessmen on the board had moved around. Gandhi had turned against the British. In his new account, the truth about the stretcher-bearer corps in the Bambatha Rebellion had grown into another "truth":

> The Zulu "rebellion" broke out just while attempts were being made to impose further disabilities upon Indians in the Transvaal … therefore I made an offer to the Government to raise a Stretcher-bearer Corps for service with the troops… The corps was on active service for a month… We had to cleanse the wounds of several Zulus which had not been attended to for as many as five or six days and were therefore stinking horribly. We liked the work. The Zulus could not talk to us, but from their gestures and the expression in their eyes they seemed to feel as if God had sent them our succour.[62]

The retrospectively constructed image of the flogged, defeated Zulu—a dumb animal conveying his gratitude to God's missionaries of peace—is completely at odds, as we shall see, with his views about Zulus that were published in the pages of his newspapers during those years. In Gandhi's re-imagining of the story of the Bambatha Rebellion, the broken Zulu becomes the inspiration for another of his causes: celibacy.

> While I was working with the Corps, two ideas which had long been floating in my mind became firmly fixed. First, an aspirant after a life exclusively devoted to service must lead a life of celibacy. Second, he must accept poverty as a constant companion through life. He may not take up any occupation which would prevent him or make him shrink from undertaking the lowliest of duties or largest risks.[63]

Gandhi's experiments with poverty and celibacy began in the Phoenix Settlement, a commune he had set up in 1904. It was built on a hundred-acre plot of land in the heart of Natal amidst the sugar fields that were worked by Indian indentured labour. The members of the commune included a few Europeans and (non-indentured) Indians, but no black Africans.

IN SEPTEMBER 1906, only months after the Bambatha Rebellion, despite his offers of friendship and his demonstrations of loyalty, Gandhi was let down once again. The British government passed the Transvaal Asiatic Law Amendment Act. Its purpose was to control Indian merchants (who were regarded as competition to white traders) from entering the Transvaal.[64] Every Asian had to register and produce on demand a thumb-printed certificate of identity. Unregistered people were liable to be deported. There was no right of appeal. Suddenly, a community whose leader had been dreaming of an "Imperial Brotherhood" had been once again reduced "to a status lower than that of the aboriginal races of South Africa and the Coloured People."[65]

Gandhi led the struggle of the passenger Indians bravely, and from the front. Two thousand people burned their passes in a public bonfire; Gandhi was assaulted mercilessly, arrested and imprisoned. And then his nightmares became a reality. The man who could not bear to even share the entrance to a post office with "Kaffirs" now had to share a prison cell with them:

> We were all prepared for hardships, but not quite for this experience. We could understand not being classed with the Whites, but to be placed on the same level with the Natives seemed to be too much to put up with. I then felt that Indians had not launched our passive resistance too soon. Here was further proof that the obnoxious law was meant to emasculate the Indians… Apart from whether or not this implies degradation, I must say it is rather dangerous. Kaffirs as a rule are uncivilised—the convicts even more so. They are troublesome, very dirty and live almost like animals.[66]

A year later, the sixteenth of the 20 years he spent in South Africa, he wrote "My Second Experience in Gaol" in the *Indian Opinion* (16 January 1909):

> I was given a bed in a cell where there were mostly Kaffir prisoners who had been lying ill. I spent the night in this cell in great misery and fear… I read the *Bhagvad Gita* which I had carried with me. I read the verses which had a bearing on my situation and meditating on them, managed to compose myself. The reason why I felt so uneasy was that the Kaffir and Chinese prisoners appeared to be wild, murderous and given to immoral ways… He [the Chinese] appeared to be worse. He came near the bed and looked closely at me. I kept still. Then he went to a Kaffir lying in bed. The two exchanged obscene jokes, uncovering each other's genitals… I have resolved in my mind on an agitation to ensure that Indian prisoners are not lodged with Kaffirs or others. We cannot ignore the fact that there is no common ground between them and us. Moreover those who wish to sleep in the same room as them have ulterior motives for doing so.[67]

From inside jail Gandhi began to petition the White authorities for separate wards in prisons. He led battles demanding

segregation on many counts: he wanted separate blankets because he worried that "a blanket that has been used by the dirtiest of Kaffirs may later fall to an Indian's lot."[68] He wanted prison meals specially suited to Indians—rice served with ghee[69]—and refused to eat the "mealie pap" that the "Kaffirs" seemed to relish. He also agitated for separate lavatories for Indian prisoners.[70]

Twenty years later, in 1928, the truth about all this had transmogrified into another story altogether. Responding to a proposal for segregated education for Indians and Africans in South Africa, Gandhi wrote:

> Indians have too much in common with the Africans to think of isolating themselves from them. They cannot exist in South Africa for any length of time without the active sympathy and friendship of the Africans. I am not aware of the general body of the Indians having ever adopted an air of superiority towards their African brethren, and it would be a tragedy if any such movement were to gain ground among the Indian settlers of South Africa.[71]

Then, in 1939, disagreeing with Jawaharlal Nehru, who believed that black Africans and Indians should stand together against the white regime in South Africa, Gandhi contradicted himself once more: "However much one may sympathise with the Bantus, Indians cannot make common cause with them."[72]

Gandhi was an educated, well-travelled man. He would have been aware of the winds that were blowing in other parts of the world. His disgraceful words about Africans were written around the same time W.E.B. Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folk*: "One ever feels this two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[73]

Gandhi's attempts to collaborate with a colonial regime were taking place at the same time that the anarchist Emma Goldman was saying:

> The centralisation of power has brought into being an international feeling of solidarity among the oppressed nations of the world; a solidarity which represents a greater harmony of interests between the working man of America and his brothers abroad than between the American miner and his exploiting compatriot; a solidarity which fears not foreign invasion, because it is bringing all the workers to the point when they will say to their masters, "Go and do your own killing. We have done it long enough for you."[74]

Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922), Gandhi's contemporary from India, did not have his unfortunate instincts. Though she was born a Brahmin, she renounced Hinduism for its patriarchy and its practice of caste, became a Christian, and quarrelled with the Anglican church, too, earning a place of pride in India's anticaste tradition. She travelled to the US in 1886 where she met Harriet Tubman, who had once been a slave, whom she admired more than anybody she had ever met. Contrast Gandhi's attitude towards the African people to Pandita Ramabai's description of her meeting with Harriet Tubman:

> Harriet still works. She has a little house of her own, where she and her husband live and work together for their own people… Harriet is very large and strong. She hugged me like a bear and shook me by the hand till my poor little hand ached![75]

In 1873, Jotirao Phule dedicated his *Gulamgiri* (Slavery) to

> The good people of the United States as a token of admiration for their sublime disinterested and self sacrificing devotion in the cause of Negro Slavery; and with an earnest desire, that my countrymen may take their noble example as their guide in the emancipation of their Shudra Brothers from the trammels of Brahmin thraldom.[76]

Phule—who among other things, campaigned for widow remarriage, girls' education, and started a school for untouchables—described how "the owners of slaves treated the slaves as beasts of burden, raining kicks and blows on them all the time and starving them," and how they would "harness the slaves as bullocks and make them plough the fields in the blazing sun." Phule believed that the Shudra and Ati-Shudra would understand slavery better than anyone else because "they have a direct experience of slavery as compared to the others who have never experienced it so; the Shudras were conquered and enslaved by the Brahmins."[77]

[IV]

BY 1917, Hindu reformers in India were wooing untouchables with an edge of desperation. The Congress had passed its resolution against untouchability. Both Gandhi, who had returned two years earlier, and the Congress leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak called untouchability a "disease" that was antithetical to Hinduism. The first All-India Depressed Classes Conference was held in Bombay, presided over by Ambedkar's patron and mentor, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad, and attended by several luminaries of the time, including Tilak. They passed the All-India Anti-Untouchability Manifesto, which was signed by all of them (except Tilak, who managed to find a way around it).[78]

Ambedkar stayed away from these meetings. He had begun to grow sceptical about these very public but completely out-of-character displays of solicitude for untouchables. He saw that these were ways in which, in the changing times, the privileged castes were manoeuvring to consolidate their control over the untouchable community. While his audience, his constituency and his chief concern were the untouchables, Ambedkar believed that it was not just the stigma, the pollution–purity issues around untouchability, but caste itself that had to be dismantled. The practice of untouchability, cruel as it was—(the Mahars for example, the caste to which Ambedkar belonged, had to tie brooms to their waists to sweep away their "polluting" footprints, and hang pots around their necks to collect their spit)—was the performative, ritualistic end of the practice of caste. The real violence of caste was the denial of entitlement: to land, to wealth, to knowledge, to equal opportunity.

How can a system of such immutable hierarchy be maintained if not by the threat of egregious, ubiquitous violence? How do landlords force labourers, generation after generation, to toil night and day on subsistence wages? Why would an untouchable labourer, who is not allowed to even dream of being a landowner one day, put his or her life at the landlord's disposal, to plough the land, to sow seed and harvest the crop, if it were not out of sheer terror of the punishment that awaits the wayward? (Farmers, unlike industrialists, cannot afford strikes. Seed must be sown when it must be sown, the crop must be harvested when it must be harvested. The farmworker must be terrorised into abject submission, into being available when he must be available.) How were African slaves forced to work on American cotton fields? By being flogged, by being lynched, and if that did not work, by being hung from a tree for others to see and be afraid. Why are the murders of insubordinate Dalits even today never simply murders but ritual slaughter? Why are they always paraded naked, raped, dismembered and burnt alive? Ambedkar tried to provide an answer:

> Why have the mass of people tolerated the social evils to which they have been subjected? There have been social revolutions in other countries of the world, why not in India, is a question that has incessantly troubled me. There is only one answer which I can give and that is that the lower classes of Hindus have been completely disabled for direct action on account of this wretched caste system. They could not bear arms and without arms they could not rebel. They were all ploughmen—or rather compelled to be ploughmen—and they were never allowed to convert their ploughshares into swords. They had no bayonets, and therefore everyone who chose, could and did sit upon them. On account of the caste system they could receive no education. They could not think out or know the way to their salvation. They were condemned to be lowly; and not knowing the way of escape, and not having any means of escape, they became reconciled to eternal servitude, which they accepted as their inescapable fate.[79]

In rural areas, the threat of actual physical violence sometimes paled before the spectre of the "social boycott" that orthodox Hindus would proclaim against any untouchable who dared to defy the system. (This could mean anything from daring to buy a piece of land, wearing nice clothes, smoking a bidi in the presence of a caste Hindu, or having the temerity to wear shoes, or ride a mare in a wedding procession. The crime could even be an attitude, a posture that was less craven than an untouchable's is meant to be.) It's the opposite of the boycott that the civil rights movement in the US used as a campaign tool; the American blacks at least had a modicum of economic clout with which to boycott buses and businesses that held them in contempt. Among privileged castes, the social boycott in rural India traditionally means "hukka-paani bandh"—no tobacco and no water for a person who has annoyed the community. Though it's called a "social boycott," it is an economic as well as social boycott. For Dalits, that is lethal. The sinners are denied employment in the neighbourhood, denied the right to food and water, denied the right to buy provisions in the village Bania's shop. They are hounded out and left to starve. The social boycott continues to be used as a weapon against Dalits in Indian villages. It is non-cooperation by the powerful against the powerless —non-cooperation, as we know it, turned on its head.

In order to detach caste from the political economy, from conditions of enslavement in which most Dalits lived and worked, in order to elide the questions of entitlement, land reforms and the redistribution of wealth, Hindu reformers cleverly narrowed the question of caste to the issue of untouchability. They framed it as an erroneous religious and cultural practice that needed to

be reformed.

Gandhi narrowed it even further to the issue of "Bhangis," or scavengers, as Gandhi liked to call them—a mostly urban and therefore somewhat politicised community. From his childhood, he resurrected the memory of Uka, the boy scavenger who used to service the household's lavatory. Gandhi often spoke of how his family's treatment of Uka had always troubled him.[80] Rural untouchables—ploughmen, potters, tanners and their families—lived in scattered, small communities, in hutments on the edges of villages (beyond polluting distance). Urban untouchables—Bhangis, Chuhras and Mehtars—lived together in numbers and actually formed a political constituency. In order to discourage them from converting to Christianity, Lala Mulk Raj Bhalla, a Hindu reformer of the Punjabi Khatri caste, re-baptised them in 1910, and they came to collectively be called Balmikis. Gandhi seized upon the Balmikis and made them his show window for untouchability. Upon them he performed his missionary acts of goodness and charity. He preached to them how to love and hold onto their heritage, and how to never aspire towards anything more than the joys of their hereditary occupation. All through his life, Gandhi wrote a great deal about the importance of "scavenging" as a religious duty. It did not seem to matter that people in the rest of the world were dealing with their shit without making such a fuss about it.

Delivering the presidential address at the Kathiawar Political Conference in Bhavnagar on 8 January 1925, Gandhi said:

> If at all I seek any position it is that of a Bhangi. Cleansing of dirt is sacred work which can be done by a Brahmin as well as a Bhangi, the former doing it with and the latter without the knowledge of its holiness. I respect and honour both of them. In the absence of either of the two, Hinduism is bound to face extinction. I like the path of service; therefore, I like the Bhangi. I have personally no objection to sharing my meal with him, but I am not asking you to inter-dine with or inter-marry him. How can I advise you?[81]

Gandhi's attentiveness towards the Balmikis, his greatly publicised visits to "Bhangi colonies," paid dividends, despite the fact that he treated them with condescension and contempt. When he stayed in one such colony in 1946:

> half the residents were moved out before his visit and the shacks of the residents torn down and neat little huts constructed in their place. The entrances and windows of the huts were screened with matting, and during the length of Gandhi's visit, were kept sprinkled with water to provide a cooling effect. The local temple was white-washed and new brick paths were laid. In an interview with Margaret Bourke-White, a photo-journalist for *Life* magazine, one of the men in charge of Gandhi's visit, Dinanath Tiang of the Birla Company, explained the improvements in the untouchable colony, "We have cared for Gandhiji's comfort for the last twenty years."[82]

In his history of the Balmiki workers of Delhi, the scholar Vijay Prashad says when Gandhi staged his visits to the Balmiki Colony on Mandir Marg (formerly Reading Road) in 1946, he refused to eat with the community:

> "You can offer me goat's milk," he said, "but I will pay for it. If you are keen that I should take food prepared by you, you can come here and cook my food for me"… Balmiki elders recount tales of Gandhi's hypocrisy, but only with a sense of uneasiness. When a dalit gave Gandhi nuts, he fed them to his goat, saying that he would eat them later, in the goat's milk. Most of Gandhi's food, nuts and grains, came from Birla House; he did not take these from the dalits. Radical Balmikis took refuge in Ambedkarism which openly confronted Gandhi on these issues.[83]

Ambedkar realised that the problem of caste would only be further entrenched unless untouchables were able to organise, mobilise and become a political constituency with their own representatives. He believed that reserved seats for untouchables within the Hindu fold, or within the Congress, would just produce pliable candidates—servants who knew how to please their masters. He began to develop the idea of a separate electorate for untouchables. In 1919, he submitted a written testimony to the Southborough Committee on electoral reforms. The committee's brief was to propose a scheme of territorial constituencies based on existing land revenue districts, and separate communal representation for Muslims, Christians and Sikhs, for a new constitution that was to be drafted to prepare for Home Rule. The Congress boycotted the committee. To his critics, who called him a collaborator and a traitor, Ambedkar said that Home Rule was as much the right of the untouchable as it was of the Brahmin, and it was the duty of privileged castes to do what they could to put everybody on an equal plane. In his testimony, Ambedkar argued that untouchables were as separate a social group from touchable Hindus as Muslims, Christians and Sikhs:

> The right of representation and the right to hold office under the State are the two most important rights that make up citizenship. But the untouchability of the untouchables puts these rights far beyond their reach. In a few places they do

> not even possess such insignificant rights as personal liberty and personal security, and equality before law is not always assured to them. These are the interests of the Untouchables. And as can be easily seen they can be represented by the Untouchables alone. They are distinctively their own interests and none else can truly voice them… Hence it is evident that we must find the Untouchables to represent their grievances which are their interests and, secondly, we must find them in such numbers as will constitute a force sufficient to claim redress.[84]

The British government did not, at that point, pay much attention to his testimony, though his presentation did perhaps provide the basis for Ambedkar being invited to the First Round Table Conference ten years later, in 1930.

Around this time, Ambedkar started his first journal, *Mook Nayak* (Leader of the Voiceless). Tilak's newspaper, *Kesari*, refused to carry even a paid advertisement announcing the publication of *Mook Nayak*.[85] The editor of *Mook Nayak* was P.N. Bhatkar, the first Mahar to matriculate and go to college.[86] Ambedkar wrote the first 13 editorials himself. In the first one, he described Hindu society in a chilling metaphor—as a multi-storeyed tower with no staircase and no entrance. Everybody had to die in the storey they were born in.

ANNIHILATION OF CASTE is often called (even by some Ambedkarites) Ambedkar's utopia—his impracticable, unfeasible dream. He was rolling a boulder up a cliff, they say. How can a society so steeped in faith and superstition be expected to be open to such a ferocious attack on its most deeply held beliefs? After all, for millions of Hindus of all castes, including untouchables, Hinduism in its practice is a way of life that pervades everything—birth, death, war, marriage, food, music, poetry, dance. It is their culture, their very identity. How can Hinduism be renounced only because the practice of caste is sanctioned in its foundational texts, which most people have never read?

Ambedkar's point is: how can it not be? How can such institutionalised injustice, even if it is divinely ordained, be acceptable to anyone?

> It is no use seeking refuge in quibbles. It is no use telling people that the shastras do not say what they are believed to say, if they are grammatically read or logically interpreted. What matters is how the shastras have been understood by people. You must take the stand that Buddha took … You must not only discard the shastras, you must deny their authority, as did Buddha and Nanak. You must have the courage to tell the Hindus that what is wrong with them is their religion—the religion which has produced in them this notion of the sacredness of caste. Will you show that courage?[87]

Gandhi believed that Ambedkar was throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Ambedkar believed the baby and the bathwater were a fused organism.

Let us concede—but never accept—that *Annihilation of Caste* is indeed a piece of utopian thinking. If it is, then let us concede and accept how reduced, how depleted and how pitiable we would be as a people if even this—this rage, this audacious denunciation—did not exist in our midst. Ambedkar's anger gives us all a little shelter, a little dignity.

The utopianism that Ambedkar is charged with was very much part of the tradition of the anticaste movement. The poetry of the Bhakti movement is replete with it. Unlike the nostalgia-ridden, mythical village republics in Gandhi's "Ram Rajya," the subaltern Bhakti saints sang of towns.[88] They sang of towns in timeless places, where untouchables would be liberated from ubiquitous fear, from unimaginable indignity and endless toil on other peoples' land. For the fifteenth-century poet Ravidas (also known as Raidas, Ruhidas or Rohidas), that place was Be-gham-pura, the City without Sorrow, the city without segregation, where people were free to go wherever they wanted:

> Where there is no affliction or suffering
> Neither anxiety nor fear, taxes nor capital
> No menace, no terror, no humiliation…
> Says Raidas the emancipated Chamar:
> One who shares with me that city is my friend.[89]

For Tukaram, the city was Pandharpur, where everybody was equal, where the headman had to work as hard as everyone else, where people danced and sang and mingled freely. For Kabir, it was Premnagar, the City of Love.

Ambedkar's utopia was a pretty hardnosed one. It was, so to speak, the City of Justice—worldly justice. He imagined an enlightened India, Prabuddha Bharat, that fused the best ideas of the European Enlightenment with Buddhist thought.

(*Prabuddha Bharat* was the name he gave to the last of the four newspapers he edited in his lifetime.)

Gandhi called modern cities an "excrescence" that "served at the present moment the evil purpose of draining the life-blood of the villages."[90] To Ambedkar, and to most Dalits, Gandhi's ideal village was, understandably, "a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism."[91] If Gandhi's radical critique of Western modernity came from a nostalgic evocation of a uniquely Indian pastoral bliss, Ambedkar's critique of that nostalgia came from an embrace of pragmatic Western liberalism and its definitions of progress and happiness (which, at this moment, is experiencing a crisis from which it may not recover).

The impetus towards justice turned Ambedkar's gaze away from the village towards the city, towards urbanism, modernism and industrialisation—big cities, big dams, big irrigation projects. Ironically, this is the very model of "development" that hundreds of thousands of people today associate with injustice, a model that lays the environment to waste and involves the forcible displacement of millions of people from their villages and homes by mines, dams and other major infrastructural projects. Meanwhile, Gandhi—whose mythical village is so blind to appalling, inherent injustice—has, as ironically, become the talisman of these struggles for justice.

While Gandhi promoted his village republic, his pragmatism (or what some might call his duality) allowed him to support and be supported by big industry and big dams as well.[92] His chief sponsor from the year he came back from South Africa to the end of his days, was the textile magnate and newspaper baron G.D. Birla.

The rival utopias of Gandhi and Ambedkar represented the classic battle between tradition and modernity. If utopias can be said to be "'right" or "wrong," then both were right, and both were also grievously wrong. Gandhi was prescient enough to recognise the seed of cataclysm that was implanted in the project of Western modernity:

> God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 millions took to similar economic exploitation it would strip the world bare like locusts.[93]

As the earth warms up, as glaciers melt and forests disappear, Gandhi's words have turned out to be prophetic. But his horror of modern civilisation led him to eulogise a mythical Indian past that was, in his telling, just and beautiful. Ambedkar, on his part, was painfully aware of the iniquity of that past, but in his urgency to move away from it, he failed to recognise the catastrophic dangers of Western modernity.

Ambedkar's and Gandhi's very different utopias ought not to be appraised or assessed by the end product alone—the village or the city. Equally important is the impetus behind those utopias. For Ambedkarites to call mass struggles against contemporary models of development 'eco-romantic' and for Gandhians to hold Gandhi out as a symbol of justice and moral virtue are shallow interpretations of the very different passions that drove the two men.

The towns the Bhakti poet-saints dreamed of—Beghampura, Pandharpur, Premnagar—had one thing in common. They all existed in a time and space that was liberated from the bonds of Brahminism. Brahminism was the term that the anticaste movement preferred over "Hinduism." By Brahminism, they didn't mean Brahmins as a caste or a community. They meant the domino effect, what Ambedkar called the "infection of imitation," that the caste that first "enclosed" itself—the Brahmins—set off.

The "infection of imitation," like the half-life of a radioactive atom, decays exponentially as it moves down the caste ladder, but never quite disappears. It has created what Ambedkar describes as a system of "graded inequality" in which "there is no such class as a completely unprivileged class except the one which is at the base of the social pyramid. The privileges of the rest are graded. Even the low is privileged as compared with lower. Each class being privileged, every class is interested in maintaining the system."[94]

The exponential decay of the radioactive atom of caste means that Brahminism is practised not just by the Brahmin against the Kshatriya or the Vaishya against the Shudra, or the Shudra against the Untouchable, but also by the Untouchable against the Unapproachable, the Unapproachable against the Unseeable. It means there is a quotient of Brahminism in everybody, regardless of which caste they belong to. It is the ultimate means of control in which the concept of pollution and purity and the perpetration of social as well as physical violence—an inevitable part of administering an oppressive hierarchy—is not just

outsourced, but implanted in everybody's imagination, including those at the bottom of the hierarchy. It's like an elaborate enforcement network in which everybody polices everybody else. The Unapproachable polices the Unseeable; the Malas resent the Madigas; the Madigas turn upon the Dakkalis, who sit on the Rellis; the Vanniyars quarrel with the Paraiyars, who in turn could beat up the Arundhatiyars.

Brahminism makes it impossible to draw a clear line between victims and oppressors, even though the hierarchy of caste makes it more than clear that there are victims and oppressors. (The line between Touchables and Untouchables, for example, is dead clear.) Brahminism precludes the possibility of social or political solidarity across caste lines. As an administrative system, it is pure genius. "A single spark can light a prairie fire" was Mao Zedong's famous message to his guerrilla army. Perhaps. But Brahminism has given us in India a labyrinth instead of a prairie. And the poor little single spark wanders, lost in a warren of firewalls. Brahminism, Ambedkar said, "is the very negation of the spirit of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity."[95]

"Some closed the door," he wrote, "others found it closed against them."[96]■

From *Annihilation of Caste* (1936)

Reason and morality are the two most powerful weapons in the armoury of a reformer. To deprive him of the use of these weapons is to disable him for action. How are you going to break up caste, if people are not free to consider whether it accords with reason? How are you going to break up caste, if people are not free to consider whether it accords with morality? The wall built around caste is impregnable, and the material of which it is built contains none of the combustible stuff of reason and morality. Add to this the fact that inside this wall stands the army of Brahmins who form the intellectual class, Brahmins who are the natural leaders of the Hindus, Brahmins who are there not as mere mercenary soldiers but as an army fighting for its homeland, and you will get an idea why I think that the breaking up of caste among the Hindus is well-nigh impossible. At any rate, it would take ages before a breach is made.

But whether the doing of the deed takes time or whether it can be done quickly, you must not forget that if you wish to bring about a breach in the system, then you have got to apply the dynamite to the Vedas and the shastras, which deny any part to reason; to the Vedas and shastras, which deny any part to morality. You must destroy the religion of the shrutis and the smritis. Nothing else will avail. This is my considered view of the matter.

Some may not understand what I mean by destruction of religion, some may find the idea revolting to them, and some may find it revolutionary. Let me therefore explain my position. I do not know whether you draw a distinction between principles and rules. But I do. Not only do I make a distinction, but I say that this distinction is real and important. Rules are practical; they are habitual ways of doing things according to prescription. But principles are intellectual; they are useful methods of judging things. Rules seek to tell an agent just what course of action to pursue. Principles do not prescribe a specific course of action. Rules, like cooking recipes, do tell just what to do and how to do it. A principle, such as that of justice, supplies a main heading by reference to which he is to consider the bearings of his desires and purposes; it guides him in his thinking by suggesting to him the important consideration which he should bear in mind.

This difference between rules and principles makes the acts done in pursuit of them different in quality and in content.[97] Doing what is said to be good by virtue of a rule and doing good in the light of a principle are two different things. The principle may be wrong, but the act is conscious and responsible. The rule may be right, but the act is mechanical. A religious act may not be a correct act, but must at least be a responsible act. To permit of this responsibility, religion must mainly be a matter of principles only. It cannot be a matter of rules. The moment it degenerates into rules it ceases to be religion, as it kills the responsibility which is the essence of a truly religious act.

What is this Hindu religion? Is it a set of principles, or is it a code of rules? Now the Hindu religion, as contained in the Vedas and the smritis, is nothing but a mass of sacrificial, social, political, and sanitary rules and regulations, all mixed up. What is called religion by the Hindus is nothing but a multitude of commands and prohibitions. Religion, in the sense of spiritual principles, truly universal, applicable to all races, to all countries, to all times, is not to be found in them; and if it is, it does not

form the governing part of a Hindu's life. That for a Hindu dharma means commands and prohibitions is clear from the way the word dharma is used in the Vedas and the smritis and understood by the commentators. The word dharma as used in the Vedas in most cases means religious ordinances or rites. Even Jaimini in his *Purva Mimamsa*[98] defines dharma as "a desirable goal or result that is indicated by injunctive (Vedic) passages".

To put it in plain language, what the Hindus call religion is really law, or at best legalised class-ethics. Frankly, I refuse to call this code of ordinances as religion. The first evil of such a code of ordinances, misrepresented to the people as religion, is that it tends to deprive moral life of freedom and spontaneity, and to reduce it (for the conscientious, at any rate) to a more or less anxious and servile conformity to externally imposed rules. Under it, there is no loyalty to ideals; there is only conformity to commands.

But the worst evil of this code of ordinances is that the laws it contains must be the same yesterday, today and forever. They are iniquitous in that they are not the same for one class as for another. But this iniquity is made perpetual in that they are prescribed to be the same for all generations. The objectionable part of such a scheme is not that they are made by certain persons called prophets or law-givers. The objectionable part is that this code has been invested with the character of finality and fixity. Happiness notoriously varies with the conditions and circumstances of a person, as well as with the conditions of different people and epochs. That being the case, how can humanity endure this code of eternal laws, without being cramped and without being crippled?

I have, therefore, no hesitation in saying that such a religion must be destroyed, and I say there is nothing irreligious in working for the destruction of such a religion. Indeed I hold that it is your bounden duty to tear off the mask, to remove the misrepresentation that is caused by misnaming this law as religion. This is an essential step for you. Once you clear the minds of the people of this misconception and enable them to realise that what they are told is religion is not religion, but that it is really law, you will be in a position to urge its amendment or abolition.

So long as people look upon it as religion they will not be ready for a change, because the idea of religion is generally speaking not associated with the idea of change. But the idea of law is associated with the idea of change, and when people come to know that what is called religion is really law, old and archaic, they will be ready for a change, for people know and accept that law can be changed.

** Excerpted from the "The Doctor and the Saint," Arundhati Roy's book-length introduction to Dr B.R. Ambedkar's* Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*, published by Navayana.*

Notes

1 Ruth Vanita 2002.

2 Sukta 90 in Book X of the Rig Veda tells the story of the myth of creation. It describes the sacrifice of the Purusha (Primeval Man), from whose body the four varnas and the entire universe emerged. When (the gods) divided the Purusha, his mouth became Brahmin, his arms Kshatriya, his thighs Vaishya and Shudra sprang from his feet. See Wendy Doniger (translation, 2005). Some scholars believe that Sukta is a latter-day interpolation into the Rig Veda.

3 Susan Bayly (1998) shows how Gandhi's caste politics are completely in keeping with the views of modern, privileged-caste Hindu 'reformers'.

4 In 2012, the newsmagazine *Outlook* published the result of just such a poll conducted on the eve of independence day. The question was: "Who, after the Mahatma, is the greatest Indian to have walked our soil?" Ambedkar topped the poll and *Outlook* devoted an entire issue (20 August 2012) to him. See http://www.outlookindia.com/content10894.asp. Accessed 10 August 2013.

5 See Ambedkar's *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (1945), first published as *Thoughts on Pakistan* (1940), and featured now in BAWS 8.

6 Parel 1997, 188–9.

7 In a 1955 interview to BBC radio, Ambedkar says: “A comparative study of Gandhi’s Gujarati and English writings will reveal how Mr Gandhi was deceiving people.” See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJs-BjoSzbo. Accessed 12 August 2013.

8 Cited in BAWS 9, 276.

9 AoC 16.2.

10 See Kathryn Tidrick 2006, 281, 283, 284. On 2 May 1938, after Gandhi had a seminal discharge at the age of sixty-four, in a letter to Amritlal Nanavati he said: “Where is my place, and how can a person subject to passion represent non-violence and truth?” (CWMG 73, 139).

11 BAWS 9, 202.

12 Dhananjay Keer 1954/1990, 167.

13 For an analysis of the radicalism inherent in the Ambedkar statue, in the context of Uttar Pradesh, see Nicolas Jaoul (2006). “To Dalit villagers, whose rights and dignity have been regularly violated, setting up the statue of a Dalit statesman wearing a red tie and carrying the Constitution involves dignity, pride in emancipated citizenship and a practical acknowledgement of the extent to which the enforcement of laws could positively change their lives” (204).

14 “The State represents violence in a concentrated and organised form. The individual has a soul, but as the State is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence. Hence I prefer the doctrine of trusteeship.” *Hindustan Times*, 17 October 1935; CWMG 65, 318.

15 *Young India*, 16 April 1931; CWMG 51, 354.

16 Bhagwan Das 2010, 175.

17 Jefferson says this in his letter of 6 September 1789 to James Madison. Available at http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch2s23.html. Accessed 21 November 2013.

18 Ambedkar argues in “Castes in India”, his 1916 essay, that women are the gateways of the caste system and that control over them through child marriages, enforced widowhood and sati (being burnt on a dead husband’s pyre) are methods to keep a check on women’s sexuality. For an analysis of Ambedkar’s writings on this issue, see Sharmila Rege (2013).

19 For a discussion of the Hindu Code Bill, its ramifications and how it was sabotaged, see Sharmila Rege (2013, 191–244). Rege shows how from 11 April 1947, when it was introduced in the Constituent Assembly, till September 1951, the Bill was never taken seriously. Ambedkar finally resigned on 10 October 1951. The Hindu Marriage Act was finally enacted in 1955, granting divorce rights to Hindu women. The Special Marriage Act, passed in 1954 allows inter-caste and inter-religious marriage.

20 Rege 2013, 200.

21 Rege 2013, 241. Ambedkar’s disillusionment with the new legal regime in India went further. On 2 September 1953, Ambedkar declared in the Rajya Sabha, “Sir, my friends tell me that I made the Constitution. But I am quite prepared to say that I shall be the first person to burn it out. I do not want it. It does not suit anybody. But whatever that may be, if our people want to carry on, they must remember that there are majorities and there are minorities; and they simply cannot ignore the minorities by saying: ‘Oh, no, to recognise you is to harm democracy’” (Keer 1990, 499).

22 AoC, Preface to 1937 edition.

23 Cited in Zelliot 2013, 147.

24 Here, for example, is Ismat Chugtai, a Muslim writer celebrated for her progressive, feminist views, describing an Untouchable sweeper in her short story, “A Pair of Hands”: “Gori was her name, the feckless one, and she was dark, dark like a glistening pan on which a roti had been fried but which a careless cook had forgotten to clean. She had a bulbous nose, a wide jaw, and it seemed she came from a family where brushing one’s teeth was a habit long forgotten. The squint in her left eye

was noticeable despite the fact that her eyes were heavily kohled; it was difficult to imagine how, with a squinted eye, she was able to throw darts that never failed to hit their mark. Her waist was not slim; it had thickened, rapidly increasing in diameter from all those handouts she consumed. There was also nothing delicate about her feet which reminded one of a cow's hoofs, and she left a coarse smell of mustard oil in her wake. Her voice however, was sweet" (2003, 164).

25 In 1981, all the Dalits of the village of Meenakshipuram—renamed Rahmat Nagar—in Tamil Nadu's Tirunelveli district converted to Islam. Worried by this, Hindu supremacist groups such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh together with the Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram began to work proactively to 'integrate' Dalits into Hinduism. A new 'Tamil Hindu' chauvinist group called the Hindu Munnani was formed. Eighteen years later, P. Sainath revisited Meenakshipuram and filed two reports (1999a, 1999b). For a similar case from Koothirambakkam, another village in Tamil Nadu, see S. Anand (2002).

26 Cited in Omvedt 2008, 177.

27 The figure Ambedkar cites is drawn from the Simon Commission report of 1930. When the Lothian Committee came to India in 1932 Ambedkar said, "The Hindus adopted a challenging mood and refused to accept the figures given by the Simon Commission as a true figure for the Untouchables of India." He then argues that, "this is due to the fact that the Hindus had by now realised the danger of admitting the existence of the Untouchables. For it meant that a part of the representation enjoyed by the Hindus will have to be given up by them to the Untouchables" (BAWS 5, 7–8).

28 Rege 2013, 200.

29 He says this in the April 1899 issue of the journal *Prabuddha Bharata*, in an interview to its editor. In the same interview, when asked specifically what would be the caste of those who "re-converted" to Hinduism, Vivekananda says: "Returning converts … will gain their own castes, of course. And new people will make theirs. You will remember … that this has already been done in the case of Vaishnavism. Converts from different castes and aliens were all able to combine under that flag and form a caste by themselves—and a very respectable one too. From Ramanuja down to Chaitanya of Bengal, all great Vaishnava Teachers have done the same." Available at http://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/volume_5/interviews/on_the_bounds_of_hinduism.htm. Accessed 20 August 2013.

30 The names of these organisations translate as: Forum for Dalit Uplift; the All-India Committee for the Uplift of Untouchables, the Punjab Society for Untouchable Uplift.

31 AoC 6.2.

32 Susan Bayly 1998.

33 The term was coined by V.D. Savarkar (1883–1966), one of the principal proponents of modern, right-wing Hindu nationalism, in his 1923 pamphlet *Essentials of Hindutva* (later retitled *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*). The first edition (1923) of this work carried the pseudonymous 'A Maratha' as author. For a critical introduction to Hindutva, see Jyotirmaya Sharma (2006).

34 Cited in Prashad 1996, 554–5.

35 BAWS 9, 195.

36 A few privileged-caste Hindu members of the Ghadar Party later turned towards Hindu nationalism and became Vedic missionaries. On Bhai Parmanand, a founder-member of the Ghadar Party who later became a Hindutva ideologue, see Note 11 in the Prologue to AoC.

37 For a monograph on the Ad Dharm movement, see Juergensmeyer (1982/2009).

38 Rupa Viswanath (forthcoming 2014) details the history of the colonial state's alliance with the landed castes against landless Dalits in the context of the Madras Presidency.

39 Mike Davis 2002, 7.

40 Cited in BAWS 9, 68.

41 *Harijan*, 30 September 1939; CWMG 76, 356.

42 See Guha, 2013b.

43 Tidrick 2006, 106.

44 For an archive of Gandhi's writings about his years in South Africa (1893 to 1914), see G.B. Singh (2004).

45 Maureen Swan 1985, 52.

46 Kaffir is an Arabic term that originally meant 'one who hides or covers'—a description of farmers burying seeds in the ground. After the advent of Islam, it came to mean 'non-believers' or 'heretics', those 'who covered the truth (Islam)'. It was first applied to non-Muslim Black people encountered by Arab traders along the Swahili coast. Portuguese explorers adopted the term and passed it on to the British, French and Dutch. In South Africa, it became a racial slur the Whites and Afrikaners (and Indians like Gandhi) used to describe native Africans. Today, to call someone a Kaffir in South Africa is an actionable offence.

47 CWMG 1, 192–3.

48 CWMG 1, 200.

49 For a history of indentured labour in South Africa, see Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed (2007).

50 Between the early 1890s and 1913, the Indian population in South Africa tripled, from 40,000 to 135,00 (Guha 2013b, 463).

51 Guha 2013b, 115.

52 CWMG 2, 6.

53 Adam Hochschild 2011, 33–4.

54 During the Second World War, he advised the Jews to "summon to their aid the soul-power that comes only from non-violence" and assured them that Herr Hitler would "bow before their courage" (*Harijan*, 17 December 1938; CWMG 74, 298). He urged the British to "fight Nazism without arms" (*Harijan*, 6 July 1940; CWMG 78, 387).

55 CWMG 34, 18.

56 CWMG 2, 339–40.

57 *The Natal Advertiser*, 16 October 1901; CWMG 2, 421.

58 CWMG 5, 11.

59 CWMG 5, 179.

60 Jeff Guy 2005, 212.

61 According to a note on the first page of volume 34 of CWMG, "Gandhiji started writing in Gujarati the history of Satyagraha in South Africa on November 26, 1923, when he was in the Yeravada Central Jail; vide Jail Diary, 1923. By the time he was released, on February 5, 1924, he had completed 30 chapters… The English translation by Valji G. Desai, which was seen and approved by Gandhiji, was published by S. Ganesan, Madras, in 1928."

62 CWMG 34, 82–3.

63 Ibid., 84.

64 Of a total population of 135,000 Indians, only 10,000, who were mostly traders, lived in the Transvaal. The rest were based in Natal (Guha 2013b, 463).

65 CWMG 5, 337. This is from Clause 3 from Resolution 2 of the Five Resolutions passed by the British Indian Association in

Johannesburg, following the 'Mass Meeting' of 11 September 1906.

66 *Indian Opinion*, 7 March 1908; CWMG 8, 198–9.

67 CWMG 9, 256–7.

68 *Indian Opinion*, 23 January 1909; CWMG 9, 274.

69 In a letter dated 18 May 1899 to the Colonial Secretary, Gandhi wrote: "An Indian may fancy that he has a wrong to be redressed in that he does not get ghee instead of oil" (CWMG 2, 266). On another occasion: "The regulations here do not provide for any ghee or fat to Indians. A complaint has therefore been made to the physician, and he has promised to look into it. So there is reason to hope that the inclusion of ghee will be ordered" (*Indian Opinion*, 17 October 1908; CWMG 9, 197).

70 *Indian Opinion*, 23 January 1909; CWMG 9, 270.

71 *Young India*, 5 April 1928; CWMG 41, 365.

72 Lelyveld 2011, 74.

73 Cited in Howard Zinn and Antony Arnove 2004, 265.

74 Ibid, 270.

75 Cited in Omvedt 2008, 219.

76 In G.P. Deshpande 2002, 32.

77 Ibid., 38–40

78 Keer 1990, 36–7.

79 AoC 17.5.

80 Prashad 1996, 552. In his speech at the Suppressed Classes Conference in Ahmedabad on 13 April 1921, reported in *Young India* on 27 April 1921 and 4 May 1921 (reproduced in CWMG 23, 41–47), Gandhi discussed Uka at length for the first time (42). Bakha, the main protagonist in Mulk Raj Anand's iconic novel *Untouchable* (1935) is said to be inspired by Uka. According to the researcher Lingaraja Gandhi (2004), Anand showed his manuscript to Gandhi, who suggested changes. Anand says: "I read my novel to Gandhiji, and he suggested that I should cut down more than a hundred pages, especially those passages in which Bakha seemed to be thinking and dreaming and brooding like a Bloomsbury intellectual." Lingaraja Gandhi further says: "Anand had provided long and flowery speeches to Bakha in his draft. Gandhi instructed Anand that untouchables don't speak that way: in fact, they hardly speak. The novel underwent metamorphosis under the tutelage of Gandhi."

81 *Navajivan*, 18 January 1925; CWMG 30, 71. In the account of Gandhi's secretary, Mahadev Desai, this speech from Gujarati is rendered differently: "The position that I really long for is that of the Bhangi. How sacred is this work of cleanliness! That work can be done only by a Brahmin or by a Bhangi. The Brahmin may do it in his wisdom, the Bhangi in ignorance. I respect, I adore both of them. If either of the two disappears from Hinduism, Hinduism itself would disappear. And it is because seva-dharma (self-service) is dear to my heart that the Bhangi is dear to me. I may even sit at my meals with a Bhangi by my side, but I do not ask you to align yourselves with them by inter-caste dinners and marriages." Cited in Ramaswamy 2005, 86.

82 Renold 1994, 19–20. Highly publicised symbolic visits to Dalit homes has become a Congress party tradition. In January 2009, in the glare of a media circus, the Congress party's vice-president and prime ministerial candidate, Rahul Gandhi, along with David Milliband, the British foreign secretary, spent a night in the hut of a Dalit family in Simra village of Uttar Pradesh. For an account of this see Anand Teltumbde (2013).

83 Prashad 2001, 139.

84 BAWS 1, 256.

85 Keer 1990, 41.

86 Zelliot 2013, 91.

87 AoC 20.12.

88 Gail Omvedt 2008, 19.

89 Unpublished translation by Joel Lee, made available through personal communication.

90 *Young India*, 17 March 1927; CWMG 38, 210.

91 Ambedkar said this during his speech delivered as Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee in the Constituent Assembly on 4 November 1948. See Das 2010, 176.

92 For an analysis of Gandhi's relationship with Indian capitalists, see Leah Renold (1994). Gandhi's approach to big dams is revealed in a letter dated 5 April 1924, in which he advised villagers who faced displacement by the Mulshi Dam, being built by the Tatas to generate electricity for their Bombay mills, to give up their protest (CWMG 27, 168):

1. I understand that the vast majority of the men affected have accepted compensation and that the few who have not cannot perhaps even be traced.

2. The dam is nearly half-finished and its progress cannot be permanently stopped. There seems to me to be no ideal behind the movement.

3. The leader of the movement is not a believer out and out in non-violence. This defect is fatal to success.

Seventy-five years later, in 2000, the Supreme Court of India used very similar logic in its infamous judgement on the World Bank-funded Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada river, when it ruled against tens of thousands of local people protesting their displacement, and ordered the construction of the dam to continue.

93 *Young India*, 20 December 1928; CWMG 43, 412. Also see Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (1909) in Anthony Parel (1997).

94 BAWS 5, 102.

95 In Das 2010, 51.

96 AoC, Preface to 1937 edition.

From *Annihilation of Caste*

97 Once again, Ambedkar seems to be alluding to his mentor Dewey (1922, 239), who writes: "As habits set in grooves dominate activity and swerve it from conditions instead of increasing its adaptability, so principles treated as fixed rules instead of as helpful methods take men away from experience. The more complicated the situation, and the less we really know about it, the more insistent is the orthodox type of moral theory upon the prior existence of some fixed and universal principle or law which is to be directly applied and followed." There is a certain tension here between Dewey's words—who seems critical of rigid application of principles—and those of Ambedkar, who advocates sound principles as the only possible foundation for morality.

98 Jaimini's *Purva Mimamsa Sutras*, dated sometime between the second century BCE and second century CE, is the first text in the Mimamsa school of philosophy, a school of exegesis concerned with the understanding of Vedic ritual injunctions. (Orthodox Hinduism has six schools of philosophy: Nyaya, Vaiseshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta.) The PMS consists of a systematically ordered collection of approximately 2,745 short statements, also referred to individually as sutra. Ambedkar here is referring to sutra 1.1.2. For an account of the various explanations which have been offered for the terms 'Purva Mimamsa' and 'Uttara Mimamsa', see Asko Parpola (1981). For a full translation with commentary, see Ganganatha Jha (1942); see also James Benson (2010) and Francis Clooney, S.J. (1990).

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